In an age when few could read, and when nobles and warriors disdained that accomplishment as effeminate, the chieftain and his copartners at the board might be, in some degree, instructed by a glance at the walls of his dining-hall; more especially when those stories were brought more vividly to mind by the lays of the attendant minstrels. It thus, in a non-reading age, filled an important office, at the same time that its primary use, that of furnishing and warming the ill-erected stone stronghold of the chieftain, was accomplished."

Passing by his general remarks we follow him to that part of the subject where he remarked upon the practice of decorating churches with mural paintings, which was all but universal in the middle ages, and they are now frequently brought to light when the whitewash is removed. Public buildings and halls were similarly decorated even to the middle of the sixteenth century, as shewn by a series of such ornamentations recently discovered at Carpenters' Hall, &c. Of a different character to all these, and of more interest, in a national and historic point of view, was the tapestry of St. Mary's Hall, Coventry. It was one piece, occupying the upper wall beneath the window, where the dais, or place of honour, was for the principals of the guild.

"The tapestry was divided into six compartments. One was devoted to the figure of the Trinity, which had been cut out, and a figure of justice substituted; and which was made expressly for the situation it occupies, as appears by the border. This probably took place in the reign of Elizabeth. A figure of the Virgin occupies another compartment. Two others are filled with saints and angels; but the most important were the two lowest side compartments, representing Henry VI. and his Queen, Margaret of Anjou, attended by their court in attitudes of devotion. The loyalty of the Coventry men to the unfortunate Henry VI. was really due to that monarch, as he had given them great privileges. In 1451 he bestowed on that city a very particular mark of his affection, by erecting, with a considerable district around it, a county, by the name of the city and county of Coventry, and ordered that the bailiffs from that time should be sheriffs.

Queen Margaret was so attached to Coventry, and her residence there was so frequent, that the city was termed "Queen Margaret's Bower." When the Guilds of St. Catherine were joined to the Trinity, Our Lady, and St. John the Baptist, this accession of members and wealth induced them to build the Hall of St. Mary, for their joint meetings, about the beginning of Henry VI.th's reign. The tapestry was certainly not of the same antiquity; the costume, in the peculiar pattern upon the robes of the queen and others, shewed that it was executed in the reign of Henry VII. It was unfortunate that the corporation books would not furnish them with earlier entries than the beginning of the sixteenth century. The last reparation of the tapestry was in 1826, it was then taken down, recleaned, and repaired. The portion of tapestry at present remaining in St. Mary's Hall covered but a small space of the wall. It was evident that much more was there at one period, and there were two pieces now in London, which were said to have been brought from the hall, which there was very little reason to doubt. One was in the possession of Mr. Pratt, of Bond-street, the other, an imperfect fragment, in that of Mr. Baylis, of Fulham; they belonged to a city antiquary some forty years ago, named Charles Garnold, and were publicly sold at his sale as Plantagenet tapestry from St. Mary's Hall, Coventry.

The very common use of tapestry for "best rooms in England" may be inferred from Mrs. Quickley's exclamation when Falstaff desires her to put off her garment:—"By this heavenly ground I tread on, I must be fain to pawn both my plate and the tapestry of my dining-chambers." But Falstaff tells her, "A pretty slight drollery, or the story of the Prodigal, or a German hunting in water-work is worth a thousand of these fly-bitten tapestries." These water-works and "painted cloths" were coloured in distemper either on the walls or in cloth. Of the former, Mr. Knight, in his Pictorial Shakespeare, has given a curious example from Grove House, Woodford Common, Essex, which bears date 1617, and which was painted on the wall; while the Triumphs of Julius Cæsar, by Andrew Mantegna, at Hampton Court Palace, are similarly executed in water-colours, but upon cloth, and are good illustrations of the other variety in use. But there was yet another kind of hanging of an early origin, to which he (Mr. F.) must allude, and that was of leather. From the Crusaders came accounts of the Oriental practice of covering walls with prepared or ornamented skins, chiefly those of goats and sheep. These were rectangular, or stuck together. Such hangings, or leather tapestry, were manufactured much at Venice and Cordova, and were sometimes either gilt all over or ornamented with gilt devices, in which case they bore the name of D'or Basane. Of this class of hangings, a curious fragment which once decorated the house of Albert Durer, at Nuremberg, was now in the collection of the Government School of Design, at Somerset House."

Before mentioning other places of interest visited by the association, we will give a short memorandum of a paper read by Mr. Bracebridge, on

THE REMAINS OF KINGSBURY,

a seat of the kings of Mercia, on the river Tame.

On the south of the remains, running east and west above the ravine, was a length of 71 feet of very ancient wall of sand-stone, now about 20 feet high, and terminated at each end by an octagonal tower, the sides of which were 7 feet. The wall, which is in good preservation, and of very ancient construction, was about 10 feet thick, admitting a narrow passage from tower to tower in its centre, which appeared to have been extended from the base of the S.W. tower through the north to a sally-port, now closed up. The wall extended, with a small deviation of line, 81 feet beyond the gate, and was here probably intercepted by a tower; this, however, had disappeared, and no further remains of the ancient structure were to be discovered, except in the foundation of a large oblong building within the court, unattached to any ancient structure of that early period. Three sides of a court to the west, forming a mass of buildings covering an area of about 80 feet square, had disappeared, and the whole place was now occupied as a farm-house, but the structure was exceedingly solid, and the high-pitched roof excellent. Mr. B. described the church of Kingsbury to be a handsome structure, with a square tower, in the style of the early English period. It was separated from the hall by the ravine before alluded to. On the north side was an elegant edifice, elaborately finished in an early style also, and communicating with the nave and aisles of the church by two arches; this was the Bracebridge chapel.

We add notes of a paper read at the same meeting, by Mr. Dunkin, on

LESSNESS ABBEY,*

although not immediately connected with Warwickshire.

The writer observed, that Dr. Stukeley states he saw the north wall of the church nearly entire. His sketch represents the upper portion pierced with seven lofty lancet windows, despoiled of tracery, and the principal entrance near the western end, surmounted by a semi-circular arch of the earliest Norman period, whilst several smaller windows below are represented crowned only with a segment. But the doctor's usual accuracy here fails; for though, when some time since examining the ruins, with Stukeley's sketch in his hands, the writer found the upper part of the walls taken down to the string-course on which the cills of the windows rested, the lower part was still entire, several of the lower windows existing in the places indicated in the sketch. These are, however, of the early lancet form, and though the opening is of considerable width in the interior, it diminishes to a space of little more than 5 inches on the outside, scarcely ornamented with a single moulding. Part of a receding architrave still decorates the jambs of the western entrance, but the arch being gone, its character cannot be ascertained.

The whole area of the church, cloisters, and lodgings of the monks, is still, as in Stukeley's time, a market garden; but no tombstone now remains on the eastern side. From certain indications in the boundary wall, it would appear that the church was originally about 40 feet wide and 97 feet in length, and that the tower, a structure only about 17 feet square, abutted against the northern side of the church, between the nave and the chancel, of which it formed a component part. A doorway, apparently of the time of Edward I., still exists at the south-western course of the garden, and seems to have been the principal entrance into the abbey and opening into the cloisters beneath the refectory, a building that stood on the southern side of the quadrangle opposite the church; the kitchen adjoined; the dormitory surmounted the cloisters, and the rest of the building contained the chapter-house and the conventual offices. The convent garden still remains inclosed within its ancient boundary.

The farm-house, pulled down three years since, was the site of the residence of the founder, and rebuilt by the abbots. It was in accordance with the architecture of the period, and was in capital preservation—rubble below, timber stud-work above. In it was a noble hall, containing the old solid refectory-table and the dresser, and it bid fair to last for ages. At one end was a beautiful and grand staircase which led to the lodging rooms. To the left was the finely panelled parlour. Lessness Abbey was desecrated with nineteen other "meanly endowed" religious foundations by Cardinal Wolsey, to furnish funds for building two "seminaries of learning in Oxford and Ipswich. Of the former, no relic remains save a wretched drawing by Neale; of the latter only a tottering, uncouth, brick portal."

THE PROPOSED ALTERATIONS IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

We have before alluded to the dissatisfaction with which the proposed alterations in Westminster Abbey are viewed by a large number of persons, and we are anxious to obtain some further consideration of the matter before the works are proceeded with. The outlines of the proposed plan, so far as we have been able to ascertain them, are to remove the present wood-work of the choir, to substitute stalls of an ecclesiastical character, to leave the present stone screen which shuts off the choir from the nave, but to remove the organ which now surmounts it; to divide that instrument into two parts, one of which is to be placed over the stalls on each side of the choir, but to remove the present close screens which separate the choir from the transepts, and to substitute moveable open screens in their place, *and to admit the congregation* for whom increased accommodation is to be provided, *to the transepts*. The clergy and choir will continue to occupy their present places in the stalls, the congregation will fill the choir and transepts, and the nave will continue as hitherto, perfectly empty.

There are various objections to this plan. It is urged, that as sound proceeds in a straight line, and loses much in distinctness if it diverge at an angle, it is evident that the voice of the minor canon in the stalls, who chants the prayers, will fall very indistinctly on the ear of a person in the transepts, viz., in a part of the building at right angles to that which he occupies.

It seems that the experiment was tried at the consecration of the colonial bishops on St. Peter's day, and though those who were engaged were moved to the east of the choir, and exerted a power of voice much greater than is usually requisite, we understand that they were not distinctly heard in the transepts, especially in that on their own side. Another objection urged against the occupation of the transepts, is the vicinity of statues in all attitudes, of all persons, in all costumes, from a full-bottomed wig and peer's robes to an absence of all drapery, which will scarcely admit the devotional feelings which should influence a Christian congregation. At all events, the monuments will have to be removed before the force of public opinion. Accommodation,

---

* Lessness Abbey stands about 20 miles to the westward of the new pier at Erith. It is in the parish of Erith, in the county of Kent. It was founded in 1178, by Richard de Lucy, chancellor to Henry II.

Weever, the author of "Funeral Monuments," was rector of "Lessness" in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

For a comprehensive guide on OCR and PDF Compression visit our website